

# COMMUNITY HEALTH FAIR

## (Case Study)

Behind the vision and leadership of 15 young people from a South Boston neighborhood service team, Youth Opportunity Boston was able to stage its first Community Health Fair this past summer of 2001 at Joe Moakley Park.

More than 50 other youth (from YO Boston neighborhood service teams in Dorchester, Roxbury and the South End), and more than 25 YO staff members, supported and participated in the event. But it was the creative energies and focus of the South Boston team of young people who moved the Community Health Fair from a “brainstorm session” on July 12 at the City Year building downtown, to a large and diverse gathering of health care providers, business people and community residents at Southie’s waterfront park, August 24th.

The purpose of the fair was three-fold. It was staged: 1) To bring Boston’s communities together for a day of health awareness and fun; 2) To celebrate the success of YO Boston’s first summer Transitional Employment Program (TEP); and lastly, 3) To promote the myriad of services YO Boston offers to young people in the city’s “Empowerment Zone,” or (EZ).

The Southie team members spent the weeks leading up to the fair calling healthcare providers; submitting letters to banks and businesses (seeking funding and/or other forms of sponsorship); creating and posting fliers; securing food, permits and security for the event; helping design the layout of the fair site; organizing games and activities; and helping to set-up the flow of the event.

All their efforts were rewarded when the Community Health Fair was “on,” and Moakley Park bursted with art, music, dance, food, games, fun and laughter. A local disk jockey kept the beats pumping for the hundreds in attendance at the four-hour event. While some attendees picked up information from the health providers and YO Boston information booths, others took their turns getting their faces painted, drawing and doing arts and crafts.

While those attendees were engaged, still others tried their hands (and feet) in basketball, double-dutch and a variety of dances. Seemingly, no one missed out on the free pizza, hamburgers, hot dogs, donuts, ice cream and other food - all of which were donated in support of the event.

Among the healthcare providers present were representatives from the Local Chapter of the American Red Cross Blood Drive campaign, Uphams Corner Health Center, Mattapan Community Health Center and the Women of Color AIDS Council from Dorchester.

Ever visible at the event were the colors of the four neighborhood TEP teams’ T-shirts. They were, respectively: Red -- South Boston; Orange -- Dorchester; Yellow -- Roxbury; and Blue - the South End. It was, perhaps, this collection of colors and communities in one place that was the most significant outcome of the fair. Or as one local resident at the fair put it, “I’ve been coming to this park my whole life ... I never thought I’d see the day when blacks, whites and Hispanics would all be here together, smiling and enjoying being with one another.”